CHRONICLE AND COMMENT

By ARTHUR BARTLETT MAURICE

THIS is a talk on the subject of the "rare" book by one whose knowledge of the subject is, to speak paradoxically, at once sound and exceedingly superficial. For its own sake the "rare" book may appeal only to the bibliophile, but the possibility of its discovery and its enormous value stimulates the imagination of several million Americans, scattered, as the Fourth of July orators used to say, "from the rock bound coast of Maine to the Everglades of Florida; from Portland to the Golden Gate." This is the particular season of the year, with the Yuletide ahead, when attics are being ransacked and yellowed tomes being disinterred to spur ardent hope. If all these soaring day dreams were realized these books would bring a sum sufficient to liquidate the national debt and place Europe on a pre-war financial basis. But—to look the matter squarely in the face—they are day dreams and nothing more.

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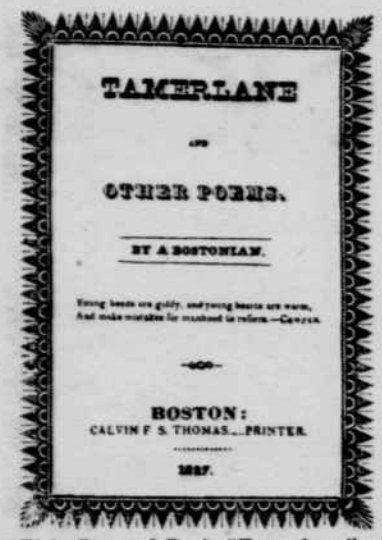
OF course, once in a great while, a day dream does come true. There is the amazing story of a clerk in a Boston book


TAMERLANE
AND
OTHER POEMS.
BY A BOSTONIAN.
Young hearts are giddy, and young hearts are warm,
And make mistakes for manhood to reform.—Cowper.
BOSTON:
CALVIN F. S. THOMAS....PRINTER.
1827.

Title Page of Poe's "Tamerlane." A Boston book clerk, reading that the only known copy in existence was in the British Museum, resolved to hunt for a second copy, and found one within half an hour.

store who happened to read that the only known copy of Edgar Allan Poe's "Tamerlane" was in the possession of the British Museum. He thought that that sounded improbable and decided that he would hunt for a second copy. Within half an hour he had found one. On his way to lunch he stopped at a second hand book stall and began rummaging through the little considered volumes that had been tossed haphazard into a counter box. The first title to catch his eye was "Tamerlane and Other Poems, by a Bostonian, 1827." The counter box refuse was being sold in lots of ten. The clerk bought "Tamerlane" and nine other volumes for $1.50. Soon after he sold the "Tamerlane" for $1,950. It quickly changed hands for $2,050, and again for $2,400. A few years ago it brought $11,000.

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BUT that musty volume with the eighteenth century date and the "s's" that resemble "f's" that has just been brought to light after reposing for so many years forgotten at the bottom of the unopened trunk is not, dear sir or dear madam, likely to prove another "Tamerlane." For the purpose of fiction it may serve to pay off the mortgage on the farm, or bring to the door the ardently wished for car, but in strict fact its probable value is not much greater than the postage needed to carry the letter of inquiry. Just as more money is spent in the search for buried treasure than is ever found, so probably more money in time, stationery and stamps is expended in letters asking the value of the dug up book than all the books so dug up ever bring. Yet this is one of those simple facts that it is so difficult to drive home. It is human nature to keep on hoping that the one book may prove to be the exception.

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A WORD or two on just what makes a book valuable. In the first place the "rare" book should be really rare, and that eighteenth century volume with the queer "s's" is almost certainly not rare. Then some eccentricity or inaccuracy or blunder brings augmented value. To illustrate, take the greatest of all books—the Bible. Do you know that there is the Breeches Bible, the Bugge Bible, the Wicked Bible, the Murderers Bible, the Vinegar Bible, the Camel Bible, the Discharged Bible, the Wife Hater Bible, the Thumb Bible and the Leda Bible? Every one of these owes its name and its monetary worth to some blunder, unintentional or designed. The Wicked Bible omitted the negative from the Seventh Commandment. The Breeches Bible read: "Adam and Eve made themselves breeches." The Vinegar Bible used the words "parable of the vinegar," instead of "vineyard." A Belfast Bible, printed in 1716, had "sin on more," instead of "sin no more."

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MANY religious books owe their augmented value to the suppression that was meant to have just the opposite effect. The spirit of the Inquisition boomed book values. It attempted to destroy entirely Grafton's Paris Bible of 1538. Certain copies escaped and these became treasures. At the time of the massacre of St. Bartholomew all France was searched for books of Huguenot tendencies and those found burned. When sanity and tolerance were restored those books that escaped the flames became very much worth while. It was the same in England, where Henry VIII. and Elizabeth sent Roman Catholic books wholesale to the flames. But it was not suppression that has made the Mazarin copy of the Gutenberg Bible the most famous book in the world. That, incidentally, was a "dug up" book, called the Mazarin Bible because it was discovered in the library of Cardinal Mazarin in Paris. While there is only one Mazarin, there are a few Gutenberg Bibles, and one of them was sold a few years ago for more than $50,000.

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SOMETIMES the "rare" books of the world have owed their preeminence to oddity of size. There have been the abnormally big books and the abnormally little books. In the Palace of the Escorial in Spain there were volumes six feet in height by four in breadth. The Thumb Bible, already referred to, is the size of a postage stamp, yet it contains copper plates. The Midget New Testament, printed in Scotland, measured three-quarters of an inch by one-half an inch. Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," containing thirty-two four line verses, has been printed in a space of four inches by three. What is probably the smallest book in the world was published in 1897 by Salmin of Padua, one of the Lilliputian printers. It is approximately one-half of an inch by one-quarter. Calculations based upon a machine for microscopic writing invented in 1862 were said to show that the whole of the Bible can be written twenty-two times in the space of a square inch.

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IN these days when every one is preparing a questionnaire or mentally answering one, and Mr. Edison is receiving general credit for the idea, why not a questionnaire about the various terms familiar to those who make a fad or a business of book collecting? How do you understand the meanings of "incunabula," "grangerizing," "colophons"? What are "Elzevirs" and "Caxtons"? Whence did the various Aldine Clubs and Aldine Presses derive the name? Just what is a First Folio Shakespeare? To answer these questions as simply and briefly as possible. "Incunabula" or "the incunables" are, as the names imply, the cradle books, the books made when the art of printing was in its infancy. "Grangerizing" comes from a certain Rev. Mr. Granger, who wrote a "History of England," in which he made allusion to every celebrated place connected with the chronicles of the land. It means extra-illustrating with every available clipping or picture having even a remote bearing on the subject.

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TO illustrate concretely., Suppose you had printed as a single volume Mr. Kipling's familiar poem "Mandalay." To carry the "grangerizing" of that to its absurd extreme—and the whole idea has become more or less absurd—it would be a matter of collecting pictures of Kipling, clippings about Kipling, pictures and clippings of Mandalay, of sunrises there, of "elephants a pilin' teak," of flying fishes playing, of British Tommies in red coats, of Chelsea housemaids with "beefy faces and grubby 'ands," of Mandalay maidens with yellow caps and green petticoats smoking "whacking white cheroots," of London buses Strandbound, of the old Moulmein Pagoda, of "bloomin' idols made o' mud," of the mist on the rice fields, of the palm trees and the tinkly temple bells, and everything else that the poem suggests or could be made to suggest. That is a good example, and could be made a fine job of "grangerizing."

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CAXTON is generally accepted as having been the first of English printers, who, in 1477, or thereabouts, set up in Westminster, and in 1477 issued his first book. There has been some question as to the exact year of his beginning, but the Caxton quarter centenary was celebrated in 1847. About a hundred years after Caxton, Louis Elzevir set up his famous press, but practically contemporaneous with Caxton was Aldus Manutius, the great Italian printer. If you will look at a present day book emanating from one of the several Aldine Presses you will find the anchor and dolphin, which was the trade mark of Aldus. The First Folio of Shakespeare, consisting of 500 copies, appeared in London in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death. The copies sold for a pound apiece. What is known as the Hoe copy brought at the Hoe sale of some years ago $13,000.

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WHAT are the most famous "rare" books in the world? There is no exact way of deciding that question any more than there is of settling to every one's satisfaction the ten greatest novels or the ten finest paintings. It is a matter of personal choice, in which national pride plays a part. But if you happen to have in your library a copy of the Gutenberg Bible, and "Helyas, Knight of the Swanne," printed by Wynken de Worde in 1512 (for this book Mr. Walter M. Hill of Chicago paid $21,000), and the "Morte d'Arthur," and the "Pembroke Book of Hours," and the first Gray's "Elegy," and William Blake's "Milton" and the first French edition of Boccaccio, printed at Bruges in 1476, and Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy," and "The Book of St. Albans," you have a real library—in fact so real that there is no other library in the world like it.

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IF you are really interested in this matter of the "rare" book, book collecting and book values, you can do no better than to read, and to read will mean to keep, Dr. A. Edward Newton's "A Magnificent Farce, and Other Diversions of a Book Collector," published a year or two ago by the *Atlantic Monthly Press*. In a chapter dealing with those persons who ransack attics in the firm belief that what is discovered is likely to prove a treasure, Dr. Newton writes: "When the famous Gutenberg Bible was bought by Mr. Huntington at the Hoe sale in New York in 1911 people generally—especially in the remote country—formed the idea that Mr. Gutenberg, having recently died, his widow had disposed of the family Bible for the sum of $50,000, and it was thought would be willing to pay a substantial fraction of this sum for any other old Bible that might be offered. Consequently 'Mrs. Gutenberg' was overwhelmed with offerings of Bibles, most of which would have been dear at one dollar."

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DR. NEWTON had had occasion casually to mention in print that the value of a Kilmarnock Burns (printed in 1786) in boards uncut might be about $5,000. The reasoning in the minds of those who flooded him with letters as a result seems to have been: "If a copy of Burns printed 125 years ago is worth $5,000, a copy half as old would be worth half as much; certainly a copy of Burns printed in 1825 must be worth, say $1,000." One old lady, suffering from sciatica, and desirous of spending some months at Mount Clemens, decided to part with her copy for that amount. She wrote: "My copy of Burns belonged to my grandfather. It is of 1825 edition, bound with gilt edges, and is in fair condition for so old a book (almost a hundred years). It is of course very yellow and some pages are much worn; however, it is all there."

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ANOTHER correspondent of the same sex wrote: "Understanding you are desirous of buying old books, I write to say that I know of families having same in their possession. Before I make inquiry I want to get all the information possible. I am anxious to make money in a pleasing way, and this seems along the lines of my taste and inclinations. Please let me know what you want to buy, by return mail." Not receiving the reply by return mail, she wrote again, this time sending a stamped envelope: "I wrote you recently about old books. I am anxious to begin. Please write at once, sending a list of books that are valuable." From a man in Texas came this: "Dear sir, I understand you have gotten out a book giving a list of old books that are valuable. Does it come free of charge? If so send it right along, as I know where some books are that I would like to know the value of."

Best Sellers

ACCORDING to the monthly score in the December *Bookman* the novels most in demand are:

1. "This Freedom," Hutchinson.
2. "Robin," Burnett.
3. "Babbitt," Lewis.
4. "The Breaking Point," Rinehart.
5. "If Winter Comes," Hutchinson.
6. "The Glimpses of the Moon," Wharton.
7. "Gentle Julia," Tarkington.
8. "The Country Beyond," Curwood.
9. "Certain People of Importance," Norris.
10. "The Vehement Flame," Deland.

Works of non-fiction in demand are:

1. "The Outline of History," Wells.
2. "The Story of Mankind," Van Loon.
3. "The Mind in the Making," Robinson.
4. "The Outline of Science," Thomson.
5. "The Americanization of Edward Bok," Bok.
6. "Outwitting Our Nerves," Jackson and Salisbury.
7. "Queen Victoria," Strachey.
8. "The Conquest of Fear," King.
9. "Painted Windows," Anonymous.
10. "Books and Characters," Strachey.

William Cabell Bruce, author of "Benjamin Franklin Self-Revealed," was recently elected Senator from Maryland. A biography of "John Randolph of Roanoke," his latest work, will be published in the near future by G. P. Putnam's Sons.

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"Humoresque," dramatized by Fannie Hurst from her book of that title, published several years ago by the Harpers, opens in Atlantic City Christmas Eve, with Laurette Taylor in the mother role.

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Mr. Sidney Dark, editor of *John o' London's Weekly*, is to follow up the "Outline of History" and the "Outline of Science" with an "Outline of Literature." Among those who will cooperate with him is Henry James Forman, author of "The Man Who Lived in a Shoe." Mr. Forman will contribute the section devoted to modern American literature.